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SUBJECT Director Casey's Role in Iran-Contra Dealings

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PETER JENNINGS: Time and again in this affair you hear the name William Casey, the Director of the CIA. As ABC's Barry Serafin reports tonight, a great many people would like him to be more forthcoming. And some of his most ardent critics would like to see him go.

BARRY SERAFIN: William Casey has said the CIA and the National Security Council worked as a team on the shipment of arms to Iran. He has offered conflicting and confusing accounts of who okayed CIA participation in November 1985 arms shipments, two months before President Reagan's written approval. And there have been reports that Iran money diverted to the Contras was mingled with CIA funds in a secret Swiss bank account.

REP. DICK CHENEY: The fact of having a bank account in Switzerland is not illegal. It may indeed have been part of a legitimate Agency operation, which may in fact have been authorized. That does not constitute evidence that would lead anybody to suggest, that would lead me to suggest Bill Casey ought to leave.

SERAFIN: But a growing chorus thinks Casey should leave, from Democrats:

REP. DAVE MCCURDY: His credibility, his ability to work with the Congress, I think, has been severely damaged.

SERAFIN: To Republicans:

SENATOR RICHARD LUGAR: Yes, I think he ought to be replaced. We ought to have a fresh start there.

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SERAFIN: And even some old Reagan hands who admire Casey think he should step down to take heat off the President.

Casey, himself, has given no sign that he's prepared to step down. He has weathered controversy before, whether it was his own financial dealings, a CIA manual on assassination, the mining of Nicaraguan harbors, or his call earlier this year to prosecute the press for reporting leaked information.

DIRECTOR WILLIAM CASEY: And if it deals with communications intelligence, the press is prohibited by law from publishing it.

SERAFIN: Casey can be gruff with reporters. He often has a mumbling style of speaking, but those who know him say it's part of a deliberate public mask.

LYN NOFZIGER: He's a very brilliant mumbler. [Laughter] He has a first-class mind.

SERAFIN: Friends and foes describe Casey as tough, shrewd and cunning. He's one of just a handful of government officials with free and direct access to President Reagan, whose campaign he managed in 1980. But he has notoriously poor relations with Congress, made worse now by the arms scandal and the suspicion that he has held back information.

REP. MCCURDY: I don't think you'll ever know exactly everything about what Bill Casey does now.

SERAFIN: In short, you don't think he has told you everything.

REP. MCCURDY: No. No, I don't think he has, nor do I think he ever will.

SERAFIN: Casey faces many more questions, but he has a long history as a Washington survivor. And not many people in this city are ready yet to bet against his survival now.